

Protocol for Public Participation in Parish Council meetings

ADOPTED at WHPC Meeting 5th December 2023 Agenda Item 23/360

Purpose: Protocol for participation in the public question session by members of the public during West Hill Parish Council meetings (meetings include ordinary meetings, extraordinary meetings or committee meetings).

In preparing this Protocol the Parish Council has referred to guidance published by the National Association of Local councils (NALC).

This protocol should be read in conjunction with WHPC Standing Orders and WHPC Code of Conduct.

All members of the public and press are welcome to attend meetings of West Hill Parish Council and have a legal right to do so under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

Although there is no statutory right for members of the public to speak at these meetings West Hill Parish Council meets and makes its decisions in public and is committed to community engagement and as such residents are warmly invited to attend and contribute during public question time. Members of the public are welcome to stay for the Council meeting as observers after the public session but will not be able to join in the discussion for the rest of the meeting.

From time to time confidential items may be discussed, in which case the press and members of the public will be excluded by resolution in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

The Parish Council meeting is not a public meeting but a meeting conducted in public. Residents are asked to respect the fact that this is a meeting to conduct Council business and interruptions during Council business are not permitted.

The agenda is the official order of business for Parish Council meetings. By law, the Parish Council cannot take action on items or issues that are not listed in the agenda. The agenda will indicate when the public participation will take place. This will be early on in the agenda so that Parish Councillors may take into account any views expressed when reaching their decisions.

The time allocated for the public participation session will be a maximum period of fifteen minutes, however this can be extended at the discretion of the Chairman.

Public participation is an opportunity for members of the public to (a) make representations, (b) answer questions or (c) give evidence relating to the business to be transacted.

A maximum of three minutes is permitted for a member of the public to speak. Supplementary comments or questions are solely at the discretion of the Chairman. The Chairman has the right and discretion to control questions to avoid disruption, repetition and to make best use of the meeting time. The Chairman is entitled to interrupt the speaker to ask for their question to be put.

Where there is an interest group of objectors or supporters, a spokesperson should be appointed to speak on behalf of the group. This will avoid duplication and make the best use of the time set aside for public participation.

The Chairman has the right to say that any question or statement is inappropriate and will not be accepted and stop the speaker from continuing to speak. If the speaker ignores the requests of the Chairman, they will be asked to leave the meeting.

If a resident is unable to attend a meeting in person, at the Chairman's discretion questions may be submitted either in writing or by e-mail for the respective meeting and should be submitted to the Parish Clerk two working days prior to the respective meeting. This is to allow sufficient time for research and preparation of an appropriate response. Questions or comments submitted in this way will be treated the same as if the person was there in person and the Clerk will state the name of the person before reading the question. If the correspondent requests anonymity their questions or comments will not be read out at the meeting as WHPC does not respond to anonymous questions or correspondence (ref WHPC Anonymous Communications policy).

How to ask questions:

- A person should raise their hand when requesting to speak.
- When recognised by the Chairman, they should state their name and say which agenda item the question relates to, if appropriate.
- The speaker should confirm they are a resident of West Hill parish.
- A person who speaks at a meeting shall direct their comments to the Chairman of the meeting.
- Only one person is permitted to speak at a time. If more than one person wants to speak, the Chairman of the meeting shall direct the order of speaking.
- Questions will be answered by the Chairman, Clerk or a Councillor in a relevant Working Group, if appropriate.

Neither Councillors nor the Clerk should be put under pressure to respond immediately to comments made under public participation. A question raised by a member of the public during a public speaking session shall not require a response at the meeting and there should be no debate or discussion between the Council and the public. The Chairman of the meeting may direct that a written or oral response be given. Members of the public are therefore requested to leave their contact details with the Clerk before leaving the Council meeting if they wish to receive a written reply to their query.

Councillors with a prejudicial interest in an agenda item will be allowed to speak during this agenda item (and then leave the room when the item is considered).

Members of the public do not have a right to force items onto the council agenda nor to insist on how matters are recorded in the minutes.

If the issue is on the agenda, then it will be discussed under the appropriate item. Members of the public will not be allowed to speak during the debate by the Council. The Chairman may decide to suspend Standing Orders where Councillors express a wish to seek additional clarification from members of the public.

A brief record of topics raised at public participation will be included in the minutes of that meeting.

All persons present will act respectfully towards every other person present and will not act in a manner that demeans, insults, threatens or intimidates him or her. All statements, questions and responses, challenges to statements, complaints or criticisms must be made politely.

All statements, questions and responses must be related to the facts of the matter and not be personal in nature. There should be no reference to personal views on any person.

Please note that offensive or threatening behaviour will not be tolerated. If a member of the public interrupts the proceedings of any meeting the Council reserves the right to curtail the contribution of that person and exclude a disorderly person. Members of the public should respect the rulings of the Chairman. The Chairman has an inherent right to exclude a disorderly person. Members of the public have a legal right to be present so excluding one or more of them will be a last resort. Alternatively, if there is serious disorder the Chairman may decide to adjourn the meeting for a short time to allow order to be restored.

History

First ADOPTED at WHPC Meeting 5th December 2023 Agenda Item 23/360